

### 17. SIGHTING OF THE LESSER FLORICAN *SYPHEOTIDES INDICA* IN GIR INTERPRETATION ZONE, DEVALIYA, GIR SANCTUARY

On June 27, 2000, I had gone to the Gir Interpretation Zone (GIZ), Devaliya, specially developed for tourism in the Gir Sanctuary. I had gone to check the health of the lions. The GIZ has a fenced area of 412 ha, with c. 100 ha of Savannah grassland. During the visit, Sardulbhai, one of my staff, informed me that an unknown bird similar to a small peahen had been spotted near the lions' feeding cage. On reaching the spot, I saw a domestic hen-sized bird with a crest on its head, at some distance. When we approached, the bird ran into a patch of tall grass and hid there in silence. To my great jubilation, I confirmed it as a male lesser florican (*Sypheotides indica*) through my binoculars and immediately took some photographs. It is for the first time that a lesser florican has been photographed in the Gir Protected Area. The same species was reported from the Gir Protected

Area (and the sighting confirmed) during May and June, 1982. According to Sankaran *et al.* (1992) the lesser florican sometimes visits Babara Vidi grassland, Maliya taluka, Junagadh district, an ideal habitat for lesser florican. Our field staff and researchers have observed florican in this area several times.

From June 27 to July 10, I visited GIZ, Devaliya regularly, twice a day, morning and evening. The florican was mostly seen in the grasslands. I saw it display twice. To ascertain the presence of other lesser florican (especially female) in GIZ, I used a group of trackers, but sighted only the same male. After July 10, 2000, the bird left the GIZ, Devaliya.

November 22, 2002

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#### REFERENCE

SANKARAN, R., A.R. RAHMANI & U. GANGULI-LACHUNGPA (1992): The distribution and status of the lesser florican *Sypheotides indica* (J.F. Miller) in the Indian subcontinent. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 89: 156-179.

### 18. GREY-HEADED LAPWINGS *VANELLUS CINEREUS* SEEN AROUND MACHILIPATNAM, KRISHNA DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

On February 17, 2001, at around 0645 hrs, I was watching waders of several species, along with other birds, on a largely flooded field, 1-2 km northwards of Chilakalapudi, Machilipatnam. Amongst the waders, which included several wood sandpipers, little ringed plovers, Pacific golden-plovers and a few little stints, were twelve larger birds. An initial look was enough to place them with lapwings (*Vanellus*) and the birds looked superficially similar to pictures of white-tailed lapwing, which I had seen.

Their posture was upright, with a small to medium sized, smooth round head with no crest. Size was similar to red-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus*

*indicus*) of which there were three in a nearby field. The head and neck were a uniform pale grey colour with no supercilium or eye-stripe. The bill was bright yellow and no wattles could be seen on the face. A wide (1-2 cm) black breast band separated the grey of the neck from the belly, which was white. Legs were bright yellow, the same colour as the bill. The wings, which were seen when one of the birds flew a short distance, showed a very distinctive 'tri-coloured' pattern, with black primaries, white secondaries and brownish coverts, in three, straight edged blocks of colour.

The birds were watched for 30-45 minutes through a Bushnell Spacemaster Telescope with

a 22x wide-angle lens and 8 x 32 Leica binoculars at a distance of perhaps 50-100 m (some of the birds were further away). Light conditions were good, with the early morning sun coming from just behind my right shoulder.

After consulting *BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT* by Grimmett *et al.* (1998), I was confident enough to identify the birds as grey-headed lapwings (*Vanellus cinereus*), which according to that book had not been recorded in Andhra Pradesh before.

On Friday February 23, at a different site, just east of Machilipatnam, 5 more grey-headed lapwings were seen, in groups of 2 and 3 in paddy

fields on either side of a small road going down to the sea.

With the exception of the wing pattern (the birds did not fly) all the same features were observed, and in addition the black tip to the yellow bill was noted.

Six grey-headed lapwings were seen again just north of Chilakalapudi, Machilipatnam on March 13, 2001 and one on April 3, 2001.

March 24, 2001

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#### 19. THE GREY-HEADED LAPWING IN TAMIL NADU - A REJOINDER

In his note on the grey-headed lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* (Blyth), [*JBNHS* 97(2): 277], Gopi Sundar writes that in peninsular India, this species has only been recorded in Bangalore in 1987 prior to his sighting in Kaliveli Tank near Pondicherry in 1997. He further writes, "Perennou and Santharam have conducted detailed ornithological surveys in this region and have not come across this species."

I would like to point out that this is not true. Gopi Sundar has only referred to two of our publications and hence overlooked my note published in *Blackbuck* 3: 25-27 (1987). In this note, I had recorded the sighting of the grey-headed lapwing in Madras city (now Chennai) on January 11, 1987. The bird was spotted on a

mud flat of the Adyar Estuary from the Theosophical Society estates. T.R. Shankar Raman had spotted it and all the nine bird watchers present on that occasion had a good look at the bird, which was a juvenile. The lapwing was not seen on subsequent visits. This record also finds a mention in the *BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT* (Grimmett *et al.*, 1998 Oxford).

May 4, 2001

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#### 20. A SIGHT RECORD OF BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER

##### *TRYNGITES SUBRUFICOLLIS* IN GOA

At about 1225 hrs on November 18, 2000, while birdwatching with a Sunbird tour group in recently irrigated paddy fields at Santa Cruz, Tiswadi taluka, Goa, Rick Heil found a buff-breasted sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*. The bird performed superbly and was watched, by RH and five other observers including Paul I. Holt, David Hemmingway and Mark Newsome,

uninterrupted for about 50 min and at ranges down to *c.* 75 m. We used a variety of binoculars and telescopes, some of the latter with eyepieces of up to 60x magnification. RH and PIH both had extensive experience of the species and all observers were completely confident of RH's initial identification. RH, PIH and MN took field notes and PIH did a hurried sketch (copies of